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ABSTRACT

In the past, there was no cry for diversity in academic debate because the exercise was strong enough to attract participants on its own merits. The professional fields of law, ministry, politics, and broadcasting were resplendent with former debaters. If there is a current lack of diversity in the forensic community, the debate community did not create it and the solution is to be found elsewhere. One survey of 50 programs showed that only one squad was totally male and 35.5% of the reported squad members were female. Another indicated that out of 64 schools, 5.78% of the debaters were African-Americans, compared to a 8.66% black student population. Those who see a problem with the current multicultural makeup of the forensic community offer such solutions as: (1) more African-American coaches; (2) more dedicated debate scholarships for minorities; and (3) more community involvement to attract attention. A change in the perception of inequality must come from the students themselves. Diversity is not the problem but the symptom, and evidence does not support the charge that the community created that symptom. The goal should be not to reach out to specific student blocks, but to the entire student population. (Contains 17 references.) (CR)

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IF THERE IS A PROBLEM, WE DIDN'T CAUSE IT

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First let's get something clear. I am biased. I long for the days when academic debate was truly challenging. The period when constructive speeches were ten minutes in length, First Affirmatives were delivered from memory, there was no such thing as "prep time", and there were five preliminary rounds on one day with the out rounds beginning early the next morning. In those enviable times, there were three divisions in debate: Senior Men, Junior Men, and Women.

There was no CEDA, NDT, nor NEDA: The American Forensic Association coordinated the activity which was totally inclusive.

Go back forty years and you wouldn't find tournaments with collapsed divisions because of lack of participants. And, with the exception of the tournaments in specific "Deep South" states, it was not a lily white experience either. Schools like Prairie View College in Texas and Grambling State University in Louisiana, now called Historically Black Colleges or Universities (Rogers, 23), were represented by teams while non-segregated institutions such as The Ohio State University, Marquette University, and the University of Notre Dame had non-white members on their squads.

There was no cry for diversity because the exercise was strong enough to attract participants on its own merits. The late Dr. Waldo Braden told the Pi Kappa Delta National Convention and Tournament in 1959 that fields such as politics, ministry,

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law, and broadcasting were resplendent with former debaters. He posited six attributes that contributed to academic debate's popularity.

> 1) Intercollegiate debating attracts students with superior intelligence. 2) It develops an intense interest in public affairs. 3) It creates a great desire to improve. 4) It throws the participant into competition with other bright students. 5) It teaches the student how to analyze, to think critically, and to listen. 6) It develop the ability to extemporize, to express thoughts clearly and fluently under pressure. (Simonson and Strange, 2)

Note there is nothing about the advantages of diversity and/or multiculturalism adding to the strength of the forensic activity. Those ideas were decades later being added.

Now we have charges that academic debate is a "white male activity." (Loge, 79) And that the lack of diversity hurts all debaters. (Loge, 81).

The research in this area is nothing new as Kristine Bartanen noted, "Educators have explored participation and success rates of men and women debaters for nearly three decades." (1)

Rogers (22) and others (Adams and Cox, 40) reported their findings in researching the literature regarding participation and success of minorities . The research led Rogers to claim that the matter must be addressed less it leads to a dissolution of the forensic activity (25).

With claims of such catastrophe facing the forensic community, it is a problem worthy of our attention.

Is diversity a desirable goal? Most of those writing

claim that it is without noting what diversity is. Arturo Madrid, a Hispanic professor of languages, defines it as, "Diversity is lack of standardization, or orderliness, homogeneity. Diversity introduces complications, is difficult to organize, is troublesome to manage, is problematical. ...In short, diversity is desirable only in principle, not in practice." (7)

But those more astute than I content that diversity is desirable so let's consider that a point of agreement. Is there a lack of diversity in the forensic community?

As advertised, I submit that if there is a problem, the debate community did not create it and the solution is be found elsewhere.

Crenshaw makes the reasonable argument that "causal reasoning supplies good reasons for 'commitments to policy choices or to systems of belief which transcend whim, caprice, or the non-reflexive "claim of immediacy"'." (70) Thus, if we are to seek a solution, we must first answer the question, "Who is to blame?" (Crenshaw, 82).

Let's start with the claim that females are under represented in forensic activity. I will agreed with Tuman's observation that sexual harassment probably exists (85) but I would deny that it is in the sole provence of female abuse, but that's for another forum. From causal reasoning, if sexual harassment keeps females from participating, shouldn't it have the same result on males who are sexually harassed? Moot point.

Seeking some empirical support, Watt surveyed the CEDA Top 50 programs in the Spring of 1989. His Top 50 was based on the Executive Secretary's Report (1). One area about which he sought information was the gender makeup of the squads. Of the schools responding, "the majority of squads consist primarily of male debaters although there are several notable exceptions among the Top 50 ranked schools. Actually, there were three squads which were predominately composed of female debaters." (6)

An analysis of the data reveals that only one squad was totally male and 35.5% of the reported squad members were female. What is the threshold for under representation? If Watt's figure is not enough, Meyer noted that "PKD's 1987 National Tournament was already composed of more female than male participants, fifty-three percent to forty-seven percent respectively." (235) Granted that this figure indicated both debaters and individual event entries.

Murphy contends that if females are to find success and happiness in the forensic experience, then they must conform to the communication style of the males (as quoted in Meyer, 235). Judging from the Pi Kappa Delta data this has not been an inherent barrier to participation.

Loge concludes that "clearly, African-Americans are under-represented in CEDA" (80) even though his own research indicates that out of 64 schools surveyed, 5.78% of the debaters were African-Americans compared to 8.66% of the student population being black. He places the blame on a perception of being under

represented.

However, Meyer in his survey of the 1987 Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament found that African-American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American participants composed ten per cent of the contestants. (236)

Realizing that our private, liberal arts college is not representative of the larger academic community, an analysis of our squad makeup over the past decade, counting only those who went to at least one tournament, shows 48 per cent female, 12 per cent African American, 8 per cent Asians and 4 per cent Cajun (a truly under represented subculture). The debate squad represents about 1 per cent of the student body.

Those who see a problem with the current multicultural makeup of the forensic community offer solutions such as more African American coaches (Loge, 85), more dedicated debate scholarships for minorities (Loge, 85; Rogers, 26), and more community involvement to attract attention (Preston, 47; Rogers, 25-26) as a way to correct the implied imbalance.

Others look to other things such as the wording of the resolutions to be debated should be changed so as to reflect minority interests. (K. Bartanen, 8)

A study of the numbers regarding female and minority participation does not reveal a problem of such magnitude to justify these solutions; plan won't meet the need.

What then is the problem? Rogers notes that "Real or not, if minority and nontraditional students perceive (emphasis added)

themselves as unwanted, unwelcomed and/or unsuccessful, how can the forensic community realistically expect them to embrace what is often perceived (emphasis added) of by them as an 'affluent, white, male activity' and to validate it and themselves through increased participation?" (24)

Loge claims a perception among the back community of "selling out" to the white community (83).

In 1989 a committee was appointed by then CEDA President Ann Gill to survey the CEDA community on several issues, one of which was the openess of opportunity. The report of the committee was that "there is considerable agreement--some even wrote that the organizaes is too open and tried to be all things to all people--at the expence of identity." (Withcombe, 28)

The problem, simply put, is one of perception since the numbers do not support a claim of inherent barriers. I submit that the forensic community in removing the gender designation of the events and expanding the umbrella has done its share in trying to reshape the perception.

The variety of solutions referred to earlier do not attack the perception issue either. In fact, I would submit that such things as designated minority scholarships, set asides for minority travel, special recruiting programs with minority or gender designations, et al preserve the perception.

The responsibility of the forensic community is succinctly stated by Freeley who writes "...educators should strive to treat all students fairly and to promote equality or opportunity for

appropriate and challenging learning experiences." (33)

Basing his opinion upon his eight years' experience as a Director of Forensics at a HBCU, Rogers noted that his students did not want "special treatment" but "asked only to be treated the same as the white males." (24)

While speaking of racial understanding, Weber's comments could well be applied to the issue of gender equality. She noted, "The beginning of racial understanding is the acceptance that different is just what it is: different, not inferior. And equality does not mean sameness." (36)

But, you might say, we as educators have done this but the perception of inequality exists. How is it to be met? The National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in American Higher Education suggests that the answer lies with the participants.

> The influence that peers have on one another is often far greater than that exerted by faculty and/or staff, providing a unique opportunity for student to support one another academically and to inspire a vision of success in the minds of fellow students. (25)

The changes must come from the participants themselves if they are to occur since they are the ones who control the culture of the forensic process (Rowland, 107).

If the numbers contribute to the perception that minorities and females are under represented, I am afraid that they are being misinterpreted. Our problem is to attract students for as Michael Bartanen reported for the Guild of American Forensic Educators in 1993, the number of schools participating in

forensics and the number of students involved is decreasing. (1)

Diversity is not the problem but the symptom. And the evidence does not support the charge that the community created that symptom. We need to be more concerned with treating the illness than the misconceived perception.

Our goal, therefore, should not be to reach out to specific student blocks but to the entire student population. We need to be more concerned about the virutes of the activity as Braden noted decades ago or the perception that forensics is dying will become a reality.

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